

*June 26, 2009*

I've taken some heat for voting against H.R. 2454, the Waxman-Markey version of the American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009 ("Barrow bungles energy bill vote," May 31, 2009), and I'd like to respectfully set the record straight on why I cast that vote.

I believe that we need to do everything we can to create new sources of energy that are clean, cheap, and abundant. However, I couldn't support the Waxman-Markey bill because of some fundamental flaws in its approach. One is a matter of fairness, another is a matter of effectiveness.

The bill is unfair because its costs will not be shared equally across the country.

The bill assumes that the only way to get new sources of energy that are clean, cheap, and abundant is to increase the cost of energy that is cheap, abundant, and dirty. That's fundamentally unfair to folks in states like Georgia who currently don't have access to abundant sources of clean energy.

Complying with the mandates of the bill would be easier, and cheaper, for parts of the country that have access to relatively abundant supplies of existing sources of clean energy.

Under the Waxman-Markey approach, Georgians would get the worst of both worlds: we'd pay more for relying on the same old dirty sources of energy, and we'd have no new sources of clean energy to show for our sacrifice. That's a particularly bad deal at a time when families are already having a hard enough time making ends meet.

The bill is also flawed in terms of effectiveness. Everyone agrees that the only way we're going to get new sources of energy that are clean, cheap, and abundant that don't exist yet is to make significant, sustained investments in research and development.

The Waxman-Markey bill doesn't provide for that investment - it hopes that someone else will.

The bill essentially relies on private investment in response to government-imposed cost increases to produce the technological breakthroughs that all of us are counting on. But the kinds of breakthroughs that we need are on the order of the Apollo program or Manhattan Project.

That means we need a corresponding level of sustained public investment to prime the R&D pump.

The Waxman-Markey bill relies on a plan of "trickle down" incentives for research and development that's going to take a lot longer, and cost the consumer a whole lot more, to get.

And that's why I'm working for something better.

The good news is that this is just the first step in a lengthy and constructive legislative debate, and I'm optimistic that we can agree on more fair and effective solutions to this challenge. That's certainly going to be my policy.